

Research and Development Classification Process (RDCP)

Overview of New Procedures

Purpose and Coverage

In 2004 the Office of Human Capital Management (OCHM) contracted for a review of the Research and Development Classification Process (RDCP). Recommended revisions were identified to streamline the process and strengthen the strategic management of the RDCP, to ensure fair and consistent administration, and to meet the intention of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) policy for impact of the person-in-the-job determinations. This guidance provides the new procedures to implement these enhancements.

The RDCP covers the position classification of research, scientific, and engineering positions. The classification is determined by criteria issued by OPM functional guides. Research positions are evaluated using criteria prescribed in the OPM Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEG), TS-23 January 1976, which is the Government-wide guide used across occupational lines to determine grade levels of research positions. The RGEG applies only to research positions that meet the specific criteria in the guide involving personal performance of professionally responsible research at the highest level functions and for a substantial portion of the time. The guide defines this as “systematic, critical, intensive investigation directed toward development of new or fuller scientific knowledge of the subject studied.”

The evaluation of engineering and physical science positions is covered by the Equipment and Development Grade Evaluation Guide (EDGE), TS-74 June 1968, TS-63 August 1966. This guide is to be used in evaluating engineering and scientific positions engaged in “planning, formulating, defining, monitoring, managing and evaluating governmental and contractor development work for new equipment and equipment systems.....Also included are their subsystems, equipment, components and associated support hardware and software.”

The RDCP provides for the review of these positions to ensure the classification is current and accurate. The guides are used to evaluate the incumbent’s responsibilities, leadership accomplishments, contributions, and performance impact against the factor levels that are typical for researchers, scientists, and engineers holding positions at certain grade levels. This review is conducted by classification experts and can include peer review panels.

Policy and Procedures

The Office of Human Capital Management (OCHM) has position classification authority for all NASA Langley Research Center positions. OCHM is responsible for determining

the propriety of coverage by the RGEG and the EDGEG in accordance with established procedures and the OPM policies and standards.

The guides provide a point evaluation system embodying the “impact-of-the-person-on-the-job” concept through which the qualifications, contributions, and professional standing are considered directly in the evaluation process. Most positions do not have unlimited promotion potential, but are limited by assignment characteristics and supervisory controls over the position. Noncompetitive promotion is permitted when “impact-of the-person-on-the-job” can be demonstrated and documented.

The following excerpts from the OPM Introduction to the *Position Classification Standards* provide guidance for this evaluation:

This policy is based on the premise that the special knowledge, skills, abilities, talents, or achievements of an individual may have an important effect on the duties, responsibilities, and expectations of the job held.

The impact of the person on the job is reflected in the classification when the performance of a particular individual actually makes the job materially different from what it otherwise would be. On the other hand, the mere fact that an individual in a position possesses higher qualifications or stands out from other individuals in comparable positions is not sufficient reason by itself to classify the position to a higher grade.

When determining grade level based on this concept, it is essential that management recognizes and endorses the duties and that the work environment allows continuing performance at a different level. The job description should clearly state the higher level duties and responsibilities. The position’s final classification must be based on grade level criteria in appropriate standards and not merely on comparison with other jobs. As with series determination, the employee’s possession of special qualifications would not affect the grade unless these qualifications are required to perform the higher level duties.

This concept also is applicable to job series determination. The qualifications of the incumbent are usually highly significant in selecting the most appropriate classification series for these positions.

Evaluation Procedures

Periodic evaluation of the individual’s role, activities, leadership accomplishments, contributions, and their impact is conducted to determine whether the complexity and responsibility of the position has changed over time. The OCHM classification specialists will apply the RGEG and EDGEG criteria in a review of the position description (PD) and other required material, including input from peer review panels, to determine whether the current grade level is accurate. It should be noted that grade levels based on personal impact are limited to the term of occupancy of that individual.

Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEG) – Research positions are evaluated using the same four common elements, regardless of the subject field.

Equipment Development Grade Evaluation Guide (EDGE) - Individuals covered by the EDGE will be evaluated using the factors covered for Parts I-III in the guide. Due to the breadth and variety of work involved in these professions, the grade level criteria are issued in three separate parts and reflect specific areas for evaluation. Each part reflects the common elements found to be essential to the profession, regardless of the subject field.

Both guides are designed to recognize the grade value of performance which involves a high degree of technical independence, originality, professional recognition, leadership accomplishments, and programmatic contributions and their impact. Determination that an incumbent may have impacted his or her position beyond its current level is based on the following indicators:

- Attraction of especially difficult work assignments;
- Unusual freedom from supervision;
- Special authority to speak for and commit the organization to a course of action; and
- Recognition as an “expert” sought by peers.

When there is sufficient evidence of personal impact to warrant promotion, it will be made noncompetitively.

OCHM retains position classification authority, including final grade level determination. However, to ensure the greatest accuracy in making the final grade determinations, a variety of information will be collected, including the evaluation and ratings from the peer panel. Peer input will be obtained to help assess the impact of an individual’s contributions to science, technology or programs.

The panel review is particularly important to the review of factor IV: Qualifications and Contributions required in the RGEG and EDGE-Part III. This factor is highly significant to selecting the most appropriate classification and grade level for these research and development positions. This is the only double-weighted factor in the evaluation. The panels are important to the successful assessment of the incumbent’s qualifications and contributions and in making a grade evaluation. The panel’s recommendations will usually be significant in determining the final grade. The panel must make its assessment on the basis of the evaluation materials at hand, along with input from the position’s immediate supervisor and other necessary fact-finding.

Fact-finding may be conducted by panel members to obtain necessary clarifying and relevant information to verify the extent of the incumbent’s contributions and their impact. Detailed guidance and format suggestions will be provided on the preparation of case material. This also will assist the panels in properly evaluating the documentation related to the factors. The supervisor is the primary contact in the

fact-finding process. Other listed contacts, or unlisted contacts may be interviewed, but the **only required** contact is the supervisor. A panel member can be appointed by the Panel Chair to be responsible for the fact-finding and to determine the necessary level of input from sources in order to verify the incumbent's contributions and impact. A summary of these findings will be reported to the panel.

Preparation and Submission of Case Material

Position Descriptions

The position description and case material is prepared by the incumbent and the supervisor. In situations where a new supervisor is assigned to the incumbent, previous supervisor(s) with more knowledge of the incumbent and the work of the position may be asked to provide input. The PD's should be prepared in a narrative format which is consistent with the factor format of the RGEG and EDGE, and should align with the related factor criteria. This provides the basis of the classification evaluation. The supervisor will certify that the PD is current and accurate and forward it through the management chain for signature and approval.

Preparation of Position Descriptions – The revision and updating of the PD is a cooperative effort with management, OCHM, and the incumbent. The supervisor is responsible for preparing the position description and ensuring that it is up to date and accurately reflects the duties and responsibilities of the position, and appropriately addresses the factors in the RGEG and EDGE. OCHM classifiers are available to offer advice and assistance. Employee input is a valuable resource in providing facts about the position.

Useful classification information is found in the Position Description Management (PDM). This tool provides a good source of summarized classification elements from the RGEG and EDGE. This information is automated and available in hard copy. In addition, detailed information to assist in updating research PD's is provided in the document, *Guidelines for Preparation of Position Descriptions for Research Positions*.

Accomplishment Record and Supplemental Material Required for Positions Covered by RGEG and EDGE Part III

An accomplishment record provides specific information on the research role, contributions, stature, and recognition of the individual being reviewed. This information is critical to the Factor IV score required by the RGEG and EDGE-Part III. It has the greatest impact on the grade level assigned, as well as evidence for the other factors. The importance of this factor score is evident in that it is the only factor that is double-weighted. Good documentation and evidence of the contributions and their impact are critical to proper evaluation. The Accomplishment Record is the primary document which illustrates how an individual's job responsibilities and performance have impacted

the position. Detailed information and a recommended format for the case material are provided in the ***Guidance for Preparing Case Material***.

Accomplishment Record and Supplemental Material For Positions Covered by EDGEG Parts I and II

The Accomplishment Record should provide specific information on the relevant factors covered by the EDGEG Parts I and II. It provides an opportunity for the incumbent to illustrate how their assignments depict the factor criteria and how their job responsibilities and performance have impacted the position. Specific contributions and evidence of their impact will be important to support the evaluation of the job. Detailed information and a recommended format for the case material are provided in the ***Guidance for Preparing Case Material***.

Roles and Responsibilities

Office of Human Capital Management

- Develops policies and procedures for position classification evaluations.
- Advises and assists supervisors on position management issues and in updating and revising position descriptions.
- Advises and assists researchers on preparation of case material and related matters.
- Conducts the initial review of the position description and makes a determination of the appropriate occupational series, NASA classification code, title, and a tentative grade evaluation, noting areas for clarification. This material is forwarded to the panel for review.
- Prepares evaluation reports with input from the panel's evaluation notes.
- Classifies the positions, including assigning proper position title, series, and grade, and issues final written evaluation reports.

RDCP Advisory Committee

- Representatives are appointed by the OUM.
- Reviews and provides recommendations on the classification evaluation process, timelines, informational guidance, and related material.

Supervisors

- Applies sound position management principles in establishing positions and assigning duties.
- Prepares, revises, and updates position descriptions, and approves and certifies the accuracy.
- Assists employees with their case material.
- Reviews and certifies case material for accuracy and completeness.

- Consults with management chain and obtains approval to submit case material.

Employees

- Provides input to supervisor and classifier for the revision of PD and notes any changes that have occurred in duties assigned or level of responsibility.
- Coordinates with the supervisor and prepares case material in accordance with guidance and recommended format.

Review Panel

- Attends panel training session. Training will provide an orientation to the RGEG and EDGE G classification evaluation procedures, the factors and rating criteria, and the scoring process.
- All panel deliberations of individual cases will be kept absolutely confidential. Panel members will not divulge details or results of deliberations. All questions regarding decisions or determinations will be referred to the OCHM representative.

Panel Chair

- Presides over individual panel meetings.
- Assigns specified cases to panel members for fact-finding, with the supervisor and others as necessary, prior to the meeting.
- Shares responsibility with OCHM representative for ensuring consistency and continuity of panel operations.

Panel Members

- Conducts fact-finding with incumbent's supervisor and others as necessary to obtain verification of the case material.
- Conducts independent reviews of the PD's, case material, professional standing and relevant information. Applies a point evaluation system to assess and determine the grade level based on the impact of the individual's qualifications, professional standing, contributions and impact on science, technology, and programs.
- Reaches consensus on the scoring and the decision. Prepares evaluation notes for each case and forwards to OCHM.

Decision Options

- Panels will conduct case reviews following the RGEG, EDGE G, and supplemental guidance provided by OCHM to assist in the rating and scoring process. The panels must decide to either accept the classifier's tentative grade evaluation or to make a recommendation from the list of decision options. The

recommendation will be documented with supporting justification provided in the evaluation notes.

- There are **seven authorized decisions** which include:
 - 1) **Upgrade** – Performance is of sufficient high quality to positively impact the position grade level. Justification is based on the impact, stature, and recognition of accomplishments.
 - 2) **Remain-in-Grade** – Performance is at a level of quality sufficient to maintain the current position's grade level.
 - 3) **Borderline or Below Current Grade** – Performance is not at the level of quality sufficient to maintain the current position grade level or the score is borderline and the situation may involve an erosion of duties or a performance problem. Justification and documentation is provided in the written notes and classifier's evaluation report. The supervisor will be notified to discuss resolution. For the RGEG and EDGEG-Part III: In resolving border-line determinations of degrees of factor IV, considerations should be given to whether the incumbent is engaged in current and vigorous professional development.
 - 4) **Refer to ST Pool** – This option is only applicable to GS-15 positions with assigned scores totaling 52 or more points.
 - 5) **Insufficient Factual Basis** – The panel does not have sufficient factual information to render a fair evaluation applying the RGEG and EDGEG criteria. The panel identifies and notes unresolved discrepancies and returns the case to OCHM. The supervisor will be notified to discuss resolution.
 - 6) **Split Decision** – This is the only non-consensus decision option. The panel cannot unanimously agree on the evaluation of the RGEG factors. Majority and minority notes are prepared and submitted to OCHM for a final decision.
 - 7) **Grade/Category Problem** – The panel is unable to evaluate the position at or above its current grade level, and concludes a position management problem may exist. The case is returned to OCHM to coordinate discrepancies and deficiencies with the supervisor.

Re-evaluation

Employees or their supervisors who are dissatisfied with the classification evaluation results may make a written request for a re-evaluation of the decision. OCHM will complete the re-evaluation within 60 calendar days of the written request.

Classification Appeals

An employee may appeal the classification and grade level of their position to OCHM.

RDCP documents and guidance can be accessed at: <http://ohr.larc.nasa.gov/rdcp/>.